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○ ISSUE 40 | ○ VOLUME 5

# Community *notes*

## Know Before You Go . . .

A Winter Storm Warning has been issued for late this evening and tomorrow (10:00 p.m. through 7:00 p.m.). This weather event may include significant snow accumulation and possible ice accumulation. Check the latest weather reports at the [National Weather Service](http://NationalWeatherService) and monitor TV and radio for up-to-the-minute news.

To receive updates from Howard County Government on your mobile devices and in your inbox, please visit [NotifyMeHoward](http://NotifyMeHoward) to sign up. You may also follow Howard County on Twitter (@HoCoGov).

During the storm and immediately afterward, please stay off the roads so the crews can clear the snow and ice more efficiently.

If your travel is mandatory, be prepared before you depart. Maryland's State Highway Administration has prepared a fact sheet for Winter Driving Tips. Click [here](#) to be prepared for Winter travel. Additionally, visit [www.MD511.org](http://www.MD511.org) or call 511 for the latest on road conditions.

If you experience a power outage, report it immediately to [BGE](#) at 877-778-2222, report to [Pepco](#) at 877-737-2662).



## Greeting

Meteorological Spring began on Monday, March 3. Although tomorrow promises more winter weather, Spring really is just around the corner!

*Smaykay*

## Daylight Savings Time

Daylight Savings Time begins this Sunday, March 8 at 2:00 a.m. As we "Spring forward", remember to check the batteries in your home's smoke and carbon monoxide detectors and replace them as needed.

## Council Members to Visit Columbia Villages

Howard County Council members will visit all ten of Columbia's village boards. The *Columbia Listening Tour* was designed to give County Council members an opportunity to hear directly from village board members and residents in their own communities. The Council members are seeking input on New Town zoning, village center revitalization, and other local issues impacting the villages.

Dorsey's Search: Wednesday, March 11 at 7:00 p.m.  
Town Center: Wednesday, March 11 at 8:15 p.m.  
Wilde Lake: Monday, April 6 at 5:30 p.m.  
Harper's Choice: Tuesday, April 7 at 6:00 p.m.  
Owen Brown: Tuesday, April 14 at 7:00 p.m.  
Kings Contrivance: Wednesday, April 15 at 7:30 p.m.  
Hickory Ridge: Wednesday, April 22 at 7:30 p.m.  
Oakland Mills: Tuesday, April 28 at 7:00 p.m.  
River Hill: Monday, May 11 at 7:00 p.m.  
Long Reach: Tuesday, May 19 at 7:30 p.m.

## Upcoming Wellness Classes

Howard County General Hospital offers a wide range of wellness classes. These classes are held at the HCGH Wellness Center (10710 Charter Drive, Suite 100, Columbia) unless otherwise listed. Online advanced registration at [www.hcgh.org](http://www.hcgh.org) is advised for all programs. For more information about the hospital's ongoing wellness programs, call 410-740-7601.

### Prenatal Exercise

Taught by a certified instructor. Physician permission required. Eight-week session, Tuesdays, 3/11–4/29, 6–7 p.m. \$88/eight sessions.

### The Mall Milers

Walk-for-health program at The Mall in Columbia. Blood pressure screenings on the second Tuesday of the month. 410-730-3300. Free.

### Medicare 101

Learn about Original Medicare (Parts A and B) and Prescription Drug coverage (Part D). Presented by the State Health Insurance Assistance Program, Howard County Office on Aging. 3/17, 7–8:30 p.m. Free.

### Living with Diabetes: Executive Summary

A condensed version of Living with Diabetes offered in the evening. Most insurance plans cover all or part of this program. 443-718-3000. 3/18 & 19, 4/15 & 16, 6–9 p.m.

### Essentials in Babysitting

Learn to manage children, create a safe environment and apply basic emergency techniques. 3/21, 4/11, 5/16, 9 a.m.–1 p.m. \$50.

### AARP Driver Safety

Classroom refresher for ages 50+. 3/23, 10 a.m.–2:30 p.m. \$15/AARP members, \$20/others.

### Healthy Weight Connection

Kick-start individual lifestyle changes, including diet and exercise, to help you reach a healthier weight. Receive personalized guidance from a certified dietitian. Various nutrition topics and gentle yoga. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3/24–5/14, 6:30–8 p.m. \$195.

### Fitness Fun for Seniors

Individuals age 60 and older exercise at their own pace. Includes stretching and low-impact exercise. Mondays and Wednesdays, 9:30–10:30 a.m. \$64/8-week sessions.

## Pre-Submission Community Meeting

A pre-submission meeting is planned for certain parcels of land located at the corner of Broken Land Parkway and Little Patuxent Parkway in Downtown Columbia on March 26, 6:30 p.m. at Historic Oakland (5430 Vantage Point Road, Columbia). For more information, click [here](#).

## Five Tips to Make Tax Time Less Taxing

**Check out your preparer.** All tax preparers, whether working individually or as part of a national tax preparation chain, must be licensed by the Maryland Department of Labor, Licensing, and Regulation. Make sure your preparer is properly licensed by going to DLLR's web site: <http://www.dllr.state.md.us/pg/>. In addition, ask preparers for their required Preparer Tax Identification Numbers or PTINs before agreeing to pay for their services.

**Ask about fees.** Some tax preparers do not fully disclose all their fees up front. To avoid surprises, ask for a list of all charges and potential fees before having your taxes prepared.

**Avoid Refund Anticipation Loans.** Many tax preparers offer to provide your refund immediately in the form of a refund "loan" (sometimes also called "Refund Anticipation Check"). If you take this option, however, fees and interest on that loan will be deducted from your refund. Instead, choose to get your refund directly deposited into your bank account. The deposit is usually made in just a few days, and you will get the full amount of your refund.

**File early.** Identity thieves try to steal money from the IRS by filing returns using stolen social security numbers. This also results in a lot of hassle and delayed refunds for tax payers. By filing early, you can reduce the odds of becoming a victim.

**Get help.** If you made less than \$53,000 in 2014 and need assistance with tax preparation and filing, the Howard County non-profit, Making Change, offers free tax preparation services through its Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA) Program. Visit their website at: [www.makingchangecenter.org](http://www.makingchangecenter.org), or call 410-880-5917 for more information. You can also get assistance from the AARP Tax-Aide Program. Visit [www.aarp.org](http://www.aarp.org) for more information.

## Money Matters Fair

MakingChange will host the Money Matters Fair on Saturday, March 14, 10:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. at Long Reach High School (6101 Old Dobbin Road, Columbia).

The Fair will include free activities for such as living within your means, college funding options, preparing for retirement and caring for aging parents. Workshops, financial planning sessions, tax preparation and a "credit café" where participants can obtain a credit report will be featured. Pro bono financial planners will be available for consultation. Activities for children ages 12-18 and their parents will include the popular Y-Fi (Youth Finance) interactive financial simulation designed to show how career, education and spending choices impact success.

Entertainment, refreshments and child care will be provided. Registration is requested but not required at [MoneyMattersFair.EventBrite.com](http://MoneyMattersFair.EventBrite.com).

## Preparing for Spring Home Repairs and Improvements

In February, we experienced record-breaking cold weather, along with snow, sleet and ice storms. During these extreme weather conditions, you may have needed emergency repairs for frozen or burst pipes but may have left non-emergency work (tree removal or driveway repair) for spring. When you look for someone to make such repairs, keep these tips in mind:

**Check with your insurance company first.** The company may require that you use specific contractors, or offer recommendations. Also ask about the extent of your coverage. For example, your insurance may cover the cost of replacing only damaged sections of siding and roofing materials. If you want the surrounding area to match, you would need to pay for replacing the non-damaged areas.

**Make sure your contractor is properly licensed.** Home improvement contractors and tree care services must be licensed. To verify a contractor's license, contact: the Maryland Home Improvement Commission at 410-333-6301 or at [www.dlir.state.md.us](http://www.dlir.state.md.us). Verify a tree services license by calling the Maryland Department of Natural Resources at 410-260-8511 or at [www.dnr.maryland.gov](http://www.dnr.maryland.gov).

**Be on the lookout for traveling door-to-door con artists.** They may offer low prices but never deliver. All door-to-door solicitors must be registered and carry an ID card issued by the Office of Consumer Affairs. Do not do business with an unregistered solicitor.

**Take your time and comparison shop before signing a contract.** Contracts should be specific about materials and brands, and start and completion dates. Make sure all verbal promises are included in the contract. Door-to-door sales contracts must also include a 3-day right of cancellation. **Do not obtain any County building permits yourself.** Contractors are required by law to obtain all permits.

For more information on this and other consumer topics, contact the [Howard County Office of Consumer Affairs](#).

## Bain Center Closed for Repairs

The Bain Center at 5470 Ruth Keeton Way in Columbia remains closed while damage caused by a burst water pipe is repaired. All scheduled activities at the Bain Center have been cancelled. All other Howard County senior centers are open and operating as normal. To find a senior center near you, visit the Department's Office on Aging [website](#). Check the Department's [Facebook page](#) for the latest information.

For questions or more information, contact the Office on Aging at 410-313-6410 (voice/relay) or email [aging@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:aging@howardcountymd.gov).

## Reminders

### Pedestrian Master Plan

The Howard County Office of Transportation invites the public to join them at two community meetings to gather input regarding improvements to the Pedestrian Master Plan, [WalkHoward](#). The plan will guide Howard County as we make a more walkable and sustainable community.

The meetings take place on Monday, March 16, 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. at Slayton House in Wilde Lake Village Center, 10400 Cross Fox Lane, Columbia; and on Saturday, March 28, 1:30 - 3:00 p.m. at the North Laurel Community Center, 9411 Whiskey Bottom Road, Laurel.

### Executive's Second Budget Hearing

County Executive Kittleman will hold a Citizens' Budget Hearing for fiscal year 2016 on Tuesday, March 10, 7:00 p.m. in the Banneker Room of the George Howard Building, 3430 Court House Drive in Ellicott City.

Sign-up [online](#) to give testimony at the hearing or submit written testimony. Residents may sign-up in person on the night of the public hearing beginning at 6:00 p.m. Prepare your oral testimony to be limited to three minutes.

### "H<sub>2</sub>O Help to Others"

Howard County unveiled a new program, "H<sub>2</sub>O Help to Others," for County residents who need assistance in paying water and sewer bills. The program will be funded by residential customers who voluntarily round up their bills to the nearest dollar starting with the March bill. On those bills, customers will see a check box to opt in to participate by rounding up their payments to the next highest dollar. Residents will also be given options to make on-going, or one-time, donations to the program.

Those residential customers facing disconnection of water services should contact the County's Department of Finance Water and Sewer Division at 410-313-2058.

### Online Survey

HC Drug Free asks you to complete an online survey about prescription opioids and heroin. Maryland residents who are at least 18 years old are encouraged to participate. Click [here](#) to take the survey and enter to win a \$50.00 gift card. The survey is being conducted by University of Maryland Baltimore in collaboration with the Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's Behavioral Health Administration.



Mary Kay Sigaty

[mksigaty@howardcountymd.gov](mailto:mksigaty@howardcountymd.gov)

Howard County on Twitter: @HoCoGov

Howard County Facebook: [facebook.com/hocogov](https://www.facebook.com/hocogov)

Howard County Council  
3430 Courthouse Drive  
Ellicott City, MD 21043  
(410) 313-2001